

Pasquetti S.

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*Negotiating Control:  
Camps, Cities and Political Life*

Silvia Pasquetti\*

**ABSTRACT**

Excluded from “the national order of things” refugees live under specific forms of control. Similarly, those citizens that the state considers as potential or real “enemies of the nation” live under forms of control that do not apply to other citizens. Using the paired comparison of a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank and the Palestinian districts of an Israeli city, this article argues that a focus on control can help break the strict analytical dichotomy between cities and camps and between citizens and refugees. It draws attention to the role of agencies of control ranging from humanitarian organizations to policing agencies in shaping how marginalized refugees and citizens negotiate access to scarce material and symbolic resources. In the process, it shows how the forms that political engagement takes in the city and the camp challenge fixed notions of citizenship, cities, and camps—for example, the notion that citizenship status and cities are inherently politically empowering while refugee status and camps are inherently depoliticizing.

**Key Words:** refugee camp inhabitants; the urban poor; citizenship; humanitarian government; policing, security and military agencies; politics

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Refugee camps do just that: they remove evidence of human displacement from view and contain “the problem” without resolution, as noncommunities of the excluded.

- Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (2000)

The city is a crucial condition of citizenship in the sense that being a citizen is inextricably associated with being *of* the city.

- Engin Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (2000)

## **Introduction**

Scholars of the state and urban scholars disagree about the relative salience of the state and the city in shaping modalities of political action (Rodgers, Barnett, and Cochrane 2014). Yet, they converge on the conceptualization of refugees and refugee camps as standing at one pole of the political and urban spectrum with citizens and cities at the other pole. This opposition is typically centered on fixed experiential notions of citizenship, cities, and camps, especially political ones—for example, the notion that citizenship status and cities are inherently politically empowering while refugee status and camps are inherently depoliticizing (Sanyal 2011, 879). Arendt’s (1973, 297) understanding of refugees as people that have lost a protective political community and Agamben’s ([1995] 1998) view of camps as spaces that extinguish political life constitute the main intellectual anchors for this conceptualization of refugees and refugee camps in

negative terms (e.g. Hyndman 2000; Hanafi and Long 2010). Agier's (2002) call for "an urban ethnography" of camps has convincingly connected refugees and urban spaces, but it has left mostly untouched the political contents usually attributed to concepts of citizenship, cities, and camps. Indeed, while opening up a new important line of research on refugees and cities, the debate generated by Agier's urban approach to camps has reproduced the dominant thinking with regard to refugees and refugee camps as "missing" some urban or political parts. In other words, camps are unfinished cities (Agier 2002, 337), spaces that, unlike cities, do not "entail expectations of citizenship" (Malkki 2002, 355), or again camps, unlike cities, are "'total institutions'...from which there is no escape" (Bauman 2002, 347).

Recent works have problematized this negative approach to camps and conceptualized them as political spaces and their inhabitants as political agents (e.g. Ramadan 2012; Grbac 2013; Redclift 2013; Sigona 2015). These works have extended the same conceptual language and analytic approaches to the camps that had been developed with regard to the city and the state. Thus, for example, Gbrac has argued in favor of "a right to the camp" approach, which is parallel to the "right to the city" approach, and Sigona has used the term "campzenship," a clear parallel to "citizenship," to address issues of political agency within camps. While this "political" turn in the study of camps has effectively destabilized the status of passivity and victimhood typically attached to camps, it has not as effectively challenged the privileged position of cities as political sites and citizens as political agents. However, understanding the variety of political practices and meanings that emerge among marginalized populations, whether they live in camps or in cities, requires challenging both poles of the urban and political

spectrum. In other words, scholars must problematize the fixed notions attached to camps as well as those attached to state citizenship and to cities (Sanyal 2012, 2014).

Using the paired comparison of a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank and the Palestinian districts of an Israeli city, this article argues that a focus on the sociolegal control exercised by the institutions of the ruling power and enshrined in its legal norms and dominant discourses can help break the strict analytical dichotomy between cities and camps and between citizens and refugees.<sup>1</sup> It draws attention to the role of agencies of control ranging from humanitarian organizations to policing agencies in shaping how marginalized Palestinian refugees and urban citizens<sup>2</sup> negotiate access to scarce material and symbolic resources. In the process, it shows how the forms that political engagement takes in the city and the camp challenge fixed notions of citizenship, cities, and camps.

Palestinian refugees and urban citizens live within a broader colonial-like context that cannot be understood through a reductive opposition between symbolic-political practices and material practices (Abourahme 2011, 2014). Yet without discarding the complexities of meaning and action that characterize the experiences of subordinated Palestinians in West Bank refugee camps and Israeli cities, my comparative analysis<sup>3</sup> shows how, in their respective struggle for scarce symbolic and material resources, camp inhabitants routinely use visible and collective forms of action while urban residents are hesitant to become political in the public sphere and therefore pursue more underground forms of action. I argue that understanding refugees' relatively strong propensity toward collective forms of action and urban citizens' equally strong propensity towards individualized modalities of action outside public and official arenas requires an analysis of their relationships with distinct agencies of control—specifically, UNRWA (the United

Nations Relief and Work Agency), the Israeli army, and more recently, the PA (Palestinian Authority) in the case of camp dwellers and the Israeli policing and security agencies in the case of urban citizens.

Rather than starting from the ultimately problematic assumption that refugee camps are incomplete urban or political configurations, this article begins with the fact that, like marginalized urban citizens, refugees negotiate their access to scarce material and symbolic resources in the context of powerful agencies of control. It suggests that a comparative approach centered on these different agencies of control has valuable power to shed light on the variation in political meanings and practices among subordinated people. Ultimately, the paper argues that in order to go beyond thinking in terms of the static idea that “cities and citizens” are necessarily privileged over “camps and refugees,” a comparative approach to how control is negotiated in everyday life is imperative.

The article first discusses how a focus on the forms of control that refugees and the urban poor experience helps problematize fixed notions of citizenship, cities, and camps. Second, it gives a historical-legal overview of the various forms of control that have been imposed on Palestinian refugees and urban citizens. Third, it examines an instance of associational action in the camp and one of communal frailty in the urban district. These instances illustrate how the dominant thinking about cities and citizenship being in opposition to camps and refugee status falls short of explaining the variation in practices and meanings among subordinated people across legal statuses and places. The conclusion discusses the implications of this article for the study of refugees in comparison to the inhabitants of other camp formations as well as to the urban poor.<sup>4</sup>

## **Challenging Fixed Notions of Camps, Cities, and Citizenship: A Focus on Agencies of Control**

Excluded from “the national order of things” refugees live under specific forms of control. Similarly, those citizens that the state considers as potential or real “enemies of the nation” live under forms of control that do not apply to other citizens. Sanyal’s (2011, 2012, 2014) urban approach to refugees offers a solid point of departure for comparing refugees and the urban poor. She shows that, like their urban counterparts, refugees actively shape the space around them through informal spatial practices such as squatting. While she does not look systematically at the forms of control experienced by refugees and the urban poor, her comparative approach pushes her to ask a series of provocative questions in this regard: “Could it be possible to imagine refugees as privileged in comparison to the urban poor? Does the presence of a global sovereign (humanitarian protection) and its constant negotiation with the host governments (where it is allowed to operate) not provide [refugees with] a layer of protection that the poor do not have?” (Sanyal 2012, 64). While “practical” notions of citizenship emphasize how state citizenship can be “hollowed” from within by systems of domination, for example along racial lines, the scholarship on refugees often implicitly compares them to citizens, emphasizing how they lack a fundamental protective layer within contemporary societies: legal citizenship. Sanyal’s provocative question turns this assumption on its head, suggesting that, for marginalized populations, refugee status can operate as a more effective protective layer than legal citizenship.

In this article, I do not conceptualize Palestinian refugee camp dwellers as “privileged in comparison to” their urban citizen counterparts—an assumption that in my view is as

static as the dominant notion of legal citizenship as a protective layer against dispossession and dehumanization. Yet, I do discuss how the inclusion of a humanitarian agency in the configuration of control at work in the camp on the one hand, and the pervasive presence of Israeli policing and security agencies in the city on the other, play a crucial role in differentiating how Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian urban poor maneuver to obtain scarce material and symbolic resources. Put differently, I do draw attention to an important difference between the various forms of control imposed on “unwanted” populations: the presence of humanitarian organizations in the refugee camps of the Global South (e.g. Agier 2011; Fassin 2012), and the prominent role of the coercive agencies of the state in the lives of the urban poor in both the Global South and the Global North (e.g. Graham 2010; Wacquant 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2014; Fassin 2013). I speak here about a tendency, not a clear-cut dichotomy. Of course, military, security, and policing agencies can and often do intervene in refugee camps and welfare agencies and NGOs can and often are present in the lives of the urban poor. Further, in addition to heavily controlled populations, there are also populations that are “abandoned” rather than controlled by the state or other ruling agencies. Yet, refugee populations tend to establish protracted relationships with humanitarian agencies while the urban poor are more likely to negotiate protracted relationships with the law-enforcement and security agencies.

As argued by sociologists of punishment and critical criminologists, far from operating merely as imposed external domination, the control exercised by the state and other ruling agencies deeply shapes the terrain on which marginalized populations maneuver to improve their living conditions and to formulate their social and political



claims (e.g. Wacquant 2009; Palidda 2009). The salience of practices of state control for the study of marginalized populations, whether they live in camps or cities, also emerges from both the colonial and the contemporary urban literature (see Pasquetti 2012, on the distribution of forms of control in the Israeli-Palestinian case) . For example, in his model of bifurcated legal rule in colonial South Africa, Mamdani (1996) examines how the legal apparatus of the colonial state differentiated between urban blacks living in the townships and rural blacks living on the reservations. It also regulated rural black workers moving to the cities via a system of travel permits, obliging them to stay in urban hostels that were separated from the townships. He argues that this bifurcated colonial regime of legal rule effectively created distinct political expressions and practices among urban and rural subjects and produced distinct forms of organizing within the different spatial configurations of urban townships, rural reservations and urban hostels for rural workers.

While Mamdani's model of bifurcated control centers on the law—the distinction between citizens and subjects—the literature on urban control in the West has a more developed spatial dimension and identifies the emergence of illiberal pockets of control within Western cities as well as the role of “brutal top-down control measures” in the management of those at the bottom of the social order. As Scheerer and Hess (1997, 130) put it: “internal polarization of [Western post-industrial] societies and the creation of an ever-deepening gap between the fortresses of the affluent and the migrating miserable masses are developments that are resulting in a marked *bifurcation of control styles*. The prospects are normalization and de-institutionalization for the ‘in-groups’ and an increasing brutalization at the margins for the ‘out-groups.’”

In addition to these insights on the productivity and differentiation of control, I draw on Fraser's (2010) approach to "social exclusion" as a key reference in my effort to de-essentialize both camps and cities, viewing both of them as socio-spatial configurations that are shaped by continuous processes of negotiation over material and symbolic resources. Fraser identifies three mechanisms of exclusion: a cultural denial of respect and recognition; an economic denial of resources; and a political denial of participation in decision-making. She highlights how these axes might intersect and combine to further entrench social exclusion in a multiplicity of arenas. Along these lines, contestation might also take different shapes and act in different arenas at the same time. Drawing on this intersectional definition of exclusion, I show how humanitarian organizations in the camp and policing and security agencies in the city mediate the processes of negotiation over material and symbolic resources in the two localities in ways that question what the literature largely suggests as the static difference between cities and camps.

### **A Brief History of Displacement and Control**

Lod and the Jalazon camp are historically connected. The 1948 war, which led to the establishment of the Israeli state and turned hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into refugees, caused a demographic-upheaval in Lydda (renamed Lod in the new Israeli state) and led to the creation of the Jalazon camp. In July of 1948, the Israeli army occupied the city and expelled about 50,000 Palestinian residents—including 22,000 regular inhabitants and a roughly equal number of rural Palestinians who had found refuge in the city. Expelled Palestinians left Lydda on foot and those who survived the

trek became refugees in the Jalazon camp and in other camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Since this mass displacement that transformed Lydda into the Jewish Israeli city of Lod and pushed almost all of its former Palestinian inhabitants into camps, urban Palestinian minorities in Lod and Palestinian refugees in the Jalazon camp have experienced distinct forms of control. Like the other Palestinians (about 150,000) that managed to remain inside the newly established Israeli state, the roughly 1,000 remaining Palestinians in Lydda-Lod<sup>5</sup> were simultaneously given citizenship and put under military rule. For close to a year, they were forced into two fenced-in areas of the city—one in the old city and one in a Western district of the city—and they could only leave with permits (Yacobi 2009, 33-35). While all-Arab towns and villages inside Israel remained under military rule until 1966, the military restrictions in Lod were eased in May 1949 due to the very low number of Palestinians there and the emptied city's planned absorption of tens of thousands of Jewish migrants. Indeed, in the 1950s and 1960s, newly arrived Jewish migrants who turned into Israeli citizens constituted about 90 per cent of the city's population while the number of urban Palestinians remained the same. However, due to internal migration in the 1970s, the Palestinian population began to increase and has steadily grown to reach about 25 per cent of the city's total population as of today.

The recomposition of the Palestinian population in Lod has been accompanied by state and public discourses about Palestinians in the city as a demographic-cum-security threat to their Jewish-Israeli counterparts and by practices of control, which target them as a "suspect population" to be monitored and rendered legible to state scrutiny. These practices have included, and continue to include today, the widespread use of police

informers and the police's logistical support of security agencies and the underground activities these agencies use to identify, arrest, and interrogate "political troublemakers."

In his historical account of the formation of the securitized regime of control imposed over Palestinians in Israel from 1948 to 1966, Cohen (2010, 235) describes it in this way: "one of their [the informers'] central mission ... was to report all nationalist sentiments they heard expressed in their villages and cities ... The result was a comprehensive system of reports from informers ... It was a carefully calculated system through which the security agencies tried to 'educate' Arab citizens in what they were permitted and what they were forbidden to say." As I discuss below, the monopoly of control that the Israeli security agencies have exercised over Palestinian citizens of Israel is still very much at work today in the Arab districts of Lod.

While the Israeli state has historically woven a securitized regime of control around its Palestinian citizens based on the recruitment of informers and the convergence between policing and security agencies, since 1948 Palestinian refugees in the West Bank have negotiated their lives in connection with two strikingly different types of institutions: humanitarian organizations—particularly UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency)<sup>6</sup>—and military powers—first the Jordanian army (1948-1967) and then the Israeli army (since 1967).<sup>7</sup> More recently, the establishment of the PA (Palestinian Authority)—an authority of semi-autonomous rule in the West Bank's urban centers—has added an additional third layer to the institutions that refugees must routinely navigate. Thus, in the case of Palestinian refugee camps, "control, more than in other contexts, is partial and in [a] continual process of definition. No monopoly of control exists" (Abourahme and Hilal 2009, 10-11).

In particular, the protracted interplay between military and humanitarian agencies has been particularly consequential for how Palestinian camp inhabitants have struggled to obtain material and symbolic resources. From the very beginning, Palestinian refugees have perceived UNRWA as a tool used by mainly Western international donors to reduce the unsolved question of their political rights to a “problem” of poverty and unemployment. Thus, the first generation of refugees compared UNRWA to a “narcotics castle” and its services to the “giving of a shot of morphine” (Rempel 2009, 418) aimed to convince them to accept “resettlement” (*tawteen*) while most of them clearly preferred to return to their villages and homes.

Yet, over time, refugees have also found UNRWA to be permeable to their demands, especially as UNRWA hired thousands of them to work in its bureaucratic apparatus, its schools, and its social service departments. As Farah (2010, 391) puts it, the Palestinian refugees working for UNRWA “are the glue that binds refugees to the organization and they blur the boundary between benefactor and beneficiary.” UNRWA also became more open to refugees’ concerns and desires. One example is UNRWA’s support of the establishment of “Youth Centers” in all the refugee camps, which became another important arena for collective cultural and political activities inside the camps. Thus, despite refugees’ initial mistrust, UNRWA has emerged over the decades as an institutional layer operating as a protective shield for the reorganization of the collective life of camp inhabitants. Embedded in an everyday reality marked by the Israeli army’s attacks on camp inhabitants and their built-environment and by expanding Israeli settlements (Handel 2014), refugees have come to perceive and use the presence of

UNRWA as a both a buffer institution against military repression and an arena for the articulation of their own claims and projects.

### **Camp Collective Action and Urban Communal Frailty: Some Counterintuitive Findings**

Studied together, the modalities of action prevailing among the Palestinian urban poor in Lod, on the one hand, and the Palestinian refugees in the Jalazon, on the other, contradict the idea of refugee camps as “noncommunities” and cities as quintessential incubators of associational life and collective politics. Indeed, the Palestinian urban poor in Lod are closer than the Palestinian refugees in the Jalazon camp to Hyndman’s “noncommunities of the excluded” while the latter engage more explicitly and effectively than the former in associational modalities of action that, since Weber’s ([1921] 1966)([1921] 1960) *The City*, scholars have seen as core features of urban life (e.g. Holston and Appadurai 1996; Isin 2000).

A comparison of the differing dispositions that camp and city inhabitants display toward collective modalities of action reveals how humanitarian and security practices of control deeply shape how inhabitants of the camp and the city respectively negotiate over scarce material and symbolic resources. Put differently, the protracted relationships that Palestinian refugees and urban citizens have established with different agencies of control mediate how these two segments of “the global poor” (Fraser 2010, 363) act upon their respective conditions of material-cultural-political exclusion.

The role that agencies of control play in the day-to-day struggle for material and symbolic resources can be gleaned from how they reacted to my presence as a foreign

researcher among them. Palestinian camp inhabitants quickly normalized my presence in the camp as a member of the broader “humanitarian” typology of people that they routinely encounter, for example foreign volunteers. As such, they actively and collectively sought my help to write grants for several cultural centers inside the camp, to encourage foreign delegations to support some of the camp institutions, and to write reports to foreign donors. By contrast, urban Palestinians in Lod routinely expressed an uneasy surprise about my interest in their everyday lives, stating that “the police” rather than “foreign students” are those who typically express interest in and scrutinize their lives. They worried that my presence could intensify the state scrutiny of their lives and jeopardize their individualized day-to-day struggles over scarce resources. As this brief note about my field presence illustrates, humanitarian practices in the camp and policing and security practices in the city highly affect camp inhabitants’ and urban residents’ everyday thinking about the mostly hostile environment around them and how they might act upon it in order to extract from it much needed resources.

On the one hand, camp inhabitants have developed a disposition to deal with issues of scarce material and symbolic resources collectively through the creation of associations and the organization of protests. They routinely turn to the ethos of “community” when they deal with issues such as unemployment or education: “the ethos [of community] lies in addressing social problems that affect a group by seeing the group as a community that, because it is harmed collectively, is best helped through collective response” (Collins 2010, 16). They mobilize “the language of community ...not as a knee-jerk resistance to social change, but rather as a political tool for protecting families and neighborhoods” (Collins 2010, 15).

While each layer of control plays a mediating and interactive role in the emergence of this disposition toward collective action, camp inhabitants' access to scarce resources via their relationship with UNRWA is a particularly important site for the elaboration of collective claims. Indeed, camp inhabitants have engaged with UNRWA over decades to deepen its accountability toward them.

Through their relationship with UNRWA, camp inhabitants act upon all three dimensions of Fraser's definition of "social exclusion:" redistribution, recognition, and representation. This link between claims of access to material resources, claims of collective identity recognition and claims of political participation was evident in the wave of protests against some proposed cuts in UNRWA's services that took place in 2007-2008 in the Jalazon camp as well as other West Bank camps. In the Jalazon camp, the protests included a one-day occupation of a UNRWA office in the nearby city of Ramallah. Standing in the parking lot of the occupied building, I joined a dozen women from Jalazon who approached a UNRWA truck parked in a corner of the parking lot. Two women climbed the high back of the truck and attempted to open the closed back door. Laughing, they said that they wanted to see if "they [UNRWA] hid food from us [refugees]." These women remained in the parking lot the whole time and spoke about the rising price of bread and other basic foods. They spoke about how UNRWA was responsible for protecting refugees from the threat of "starvation." At the same time, other refugees stood in front of the building's entrance holding a banner with the following message: "the people of the Jalazon camp demand UNRWA respect their rights and fulfill its responsibilities toward them." Still other camp men and women entered and occupied the building. When I joined them, I noticed how the different layers of authority



from the camp, including some members of the camp's popular committee, the representatives of various camp institutions, and groups of elderly, were all present and took turns speaking about Palestinian refugees' historical dispossession and international responsibilities as much as about the rising price of food and the cuts to UNRWA's services (see also Pasquetti 2011).

These protests were intrinsically not only about the distribution of resources but also about the protection of a specific narrative of dispossession and about the attribution of political responsibility to international state actors for the predicament of marginality experienced by the camp inhabitants. The fundamental logic of this link between (material) redistribution and (political) recognition/participation in the eyes of camp inhabitants is that unfulfilled practical needs can lead to infighting inside the camp and to the development of individualized alternatives to collective problem-solving. The backdrop of the protracted military occupation reinforces camp inhabitants' sense of urgency for protecting the flow of resources received from UNRWA and for finding formulas that guarantee a level of fairness in their distribution within the camp. To sum up, far from being a depoliticized "noncommunity," camp inhabitants are oriented toward associational modalities of action and routinely connect their day-to-day struggle against material deprivation to their struggle against the two other forms of exclusion identified by Fraser: the symbolic-cultural denial of recognition and the political denial of participation.

While Palestinian refugees of the Jalazon camp actively and collectively maneuver within and gradually expand the space created by the different layers of control, especially by the interplay between humanitarianism and military aggression, the

monopoly of control established by the Israeli state's security apparatus shrinks the space of maneuver available to poor Palestinians in Lod. In their case, the struggle against material deprivation is individualized and stands in tension with, if not at times in opposition to, the struggle for symbolic recognition and political participation, which, instead, are often identified as two key features of urban political configurations.

Like the urban poor in other parts of the world, poor Palestinians in Lod engage in informal practices in various realms of life such as housing and employment. About 50 per cent of them live in illegal structures. This is due to the “ethnocratic”<sup>8</sup> logic of urban planning in the city, which constructs their presence as a symbolic-demographic threat and effectively “illegalizes” their building activities. As their requests for building licenses are regularly refused, many Palestinian families build their houses without licenses. Many of them also run informal businesses like food stands or second-hand clothing stores. Further, criminality and drug dealing are endemic in the segregated districts of the city where most of them live. This proximity to informal and “illegal” ways of living renders them particularly vulnerable to the securitized forms of monitoring that are imposed on them, and perhaps most especially to the recruitment of police informers.

In particular, Palestinians in Lod experience informing not just as a policing practice but also as a mechanism that distributes reward and punishment. They think that those identified by the authorities as “political troublemakers” are more likely to have their informal businesses closed or their makeshift houses demolished. They are also afraid that their friends and neighbors will strike a deal by “selling information” to the Israeli police at the expense of other Palestinians. Indeed, they believe that police informers and

their families are rewarded. As an unemployed resident who failed to obtain a license to sell second-hand clothes put it: “If I were to go to the police station right now, they would give me the license. I have to become a spy to obtain a [shop] license.” Most Palestinians in Lod believe this, though the distribution of rewards and punishment by the security apparatus might be more erratic and less intentional than perceived by Palestinian residents. Though the fact remains that the perception of the link between informing and access to scarce material resources is conducive to a climate of distrust and recriminations. It is also conducive to a generalized fear of “speaking politics,” of debating collectively about issues of cultural recognition and political participation. In the words of a middle-aged Palestinian sanitation cleaner: “do you know what they [the authorities] want from us? They want us to make good foul, falafel, and hummus, and to keep silent.”

The distrust toward other residents and the fear of being singled out as a political activist hinder a collective approach to shared problems such as housing, employment, and safety. Distrust and fear frustrate attempts at collective organizing to improve material conditions. This is the case of Nisreen (a pseudonym), a woman living in a small housing project who had tried to convince other women from the project to join together and hold regular meetings to pressure the local authorities to solve the problem of the sewage waters that fill the project’s streets, especially in the winter. Remembering her efforts, she told me that she was frustrated at herself as well as the other women living in the project because they were not determined enough to build on the initial momentum to give regularity to their meetings. She said that one by one, many women withdrew from the meetings, giving a variety of reasons, including their husbands’ opposition to their

participation, lack of time due to work and domestic responsibilities and anxiety about becoming visible “public” figures in the project.

This latter problem is, according to Nisreen, the most serious and difficult problem to deal with. With regard to this, she said, “Even if we start to establish a new committee again we will face the same obstacles that we had before. People ... don’t like to be on the summit, or in the first level, they want to be on the second level.” Given the mutual distrust among Palestinians living in Lod, those who obtain visibility via direct involvement in initiatives such as holding meetings and trying to create committees often face the skepticism of other residents who question their motivations. Further, those who actively participate in such initiatives worry that their participation will make them more vulnerable to state scrutiny because the authorities are likely to interpret this participation in collective organizing as a sign of their interest in “politics.” (see Pasquetti 2013, for an in-depth study of the climate of distrust and fear among the Palestinian urban poor in Lod).

To sum up, unlike Palestinian camp inhabitants, urban Palestinians experience communal frailty and are not disposed toward associational modalities of action. Further, while Palestinian refugees elaborate their claims of recognition and participation through their day-to-day negotiation over scarce material resources, urban Palestinians’ efforts to escape material deprivation frustrate rather than facilitate their expressions of political claims while reproducing their extremely uneven power relations with local and state authorities, especially law-enforcement agencies (see also Pasquetti 2015).

## **Conclusion**

The paired comparison of Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank and urban districts in Israeli cities shows that rather than conceptualizing camps as incomplete urban-political configurations or arguing, instead, that, like cities, camps can be and often are incubators of political processes, the challenge ahead is to understand how and why modalities of action among refugees and the urban poor vary across places. In other words, the challenge ahead is to understand how and why, in certain places, like the Jalazon camp, the struggle against material deprivation becomes a privileged site for the expression of political rights-claims and the pursuit of collective action while, in other places, like the Arab districts of Lod, it is experienced as a practice that saps political energies and precludes associational action. The answer to these questions cannot be found in approaches that suggest a rigid dichotomy between camps and cities and between refugees and the urban poor.

In this article, I have conceptualized both camps and cities as socio-spatial configurations that are shaped by continuous processes of negotiation over scarce material and symbolic resources. I have focused on the role of practices and discourses of control in this negotiation and I have pointed to the fact that both refugees and the urban poor negotiate their material and symbolic-political lives in the context of powerful and often hostile agencies of control (e.g. Wacquant 2014; Agier 2011). I have argued that a comparative approach to how different agencies of control shape both the distribution of resources and the space for political action in camps and cities is a promising approach for understanding variation in modalities of action among marginalized populations, paying particular attention to their articulation of material, symbolic, and political struggles (Fraser 2010).

This comparative approach to camps and cities resonates with recent attempts to look at camps through an urban lens, especially with Sanyal's (2012, 2014) comparative work on spatial practices and politics among refugees and the urban poor in the Global South. However, it is more effective at challenging the dichotomy between camps and cities because, by adding a counterintuitive case of urban fragmentation and depoliticization, it de-essentializes the city rather than seeing it as a taken-for-granted pole of the urban-political spectrum. The comparative approach here developed also opens up a new line of inquiry about how humanitarian agencies, state law-enforcement, and military agencies become entangled in both the material and symbolic worlds of camps and cities, and about the conditions under which these various agencies of control facilitate or hinder associational modalities of action.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My use of “control” excludes informal social control, for example in the household or among peers.

<sup>2</sup> I use “urban citizens,” “minority citizens” and “the Palestinian urban poor” to refer to Palestinian citizens of Israel living as urban minorities in Lod.

<sup>3</sup> The data used in this article were produced through fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted within and across the refugee camp and the city in 2007-2008. I also repeatedly traveled across the Green Line, the “border” between Israel and the West Bank and visited several other West Bank refugee camps as well as other segregated Arab districts inside Israeli cities.

<sup>4</sup> While there are refugee and migrant populations living in cities, urban sociologists and geographers typically use the concept of “the urban poor” to refer to marginalized segments of the citizenry.

<sup>5</sup> With the goal of locating a major junction of the railway system in Western Lydda, the British mandate authority (1920-1948) had created a district there to house the British staff and the Palestinian train workers. In 1948 the Israeli army allowed about five hundred Palestinian rail workers and their families to stay in the district in order to continue to operate the trains. Roughly five hundred other Palestinians, mainly the elderly and those wounded in the fighting, were left in the old city.

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations established UNRWA in 1949 to help the approximately 750,000 Palestinian refugees displaced during the 1948 war. Palestinian refugees reached Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA operated and still operates today in these five areas.

<sup>7</sup> During its rule over the West Bank (1948-1967) the Jordanian state gave citizenship to the Palestinians living there, including Palestinian refugees, but placed them under tight military control. After the 1967 war, the Israeli state established its military rule over the West Bank without extending its citizenship to the Palestinians living there. In 1988 Jordan relinquished any claim over the West Bank.

<sup>8</sup> Yiftachel (2006) uses the concept of “ethnocracy” to refer to a political regime that distributes resources and rights according to the ethnic membership of its citizens. “Ethnocratic” urban planning reorganizes the space in ways that privilege certain ethnic collectivities over others. In the case of Israeli cities with a sizeable Palestinian minority, the urban districts inhabited by Palestinians inside Israeli cities constitute

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“internal frontiers, into which Jewish presence should expand” or which need to be contained with the construction of Jewish Israeli neighborhoods around them (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003, 679-680).



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**Bio:** Silvia Pasquetti is a Research Associate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge. In September 2015 she will take up her post as Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Newcastle. Email: [sp638@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sp638@cam.ac.uk).